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ABSTRACT

This survey deals with the attitude of Arkansas principals toward matters which were lacking in their preparation and what should have been provided to them. Of the 1,021 principals in Arkansas' public and private schools, 661 usable responses were received. Emphasized is the dichotomy between theory and practice as the basis for principals' preparation. Results indicate a contradiction between team building and a lack of interpersonal skills. Curricular change is proposed. Appended are responses ranked in descending order of acceptability. (SI)

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THE ATTITUDES OF PRACTICING PRINCIPALS IN ARKANSAS TOWARD THEIR TRAINING PROGRAM

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The reform movement in education has featured several recurring themes. One of these is that professional preparation is ill-fitting for the jobs which professionals must fill. The Carnegie and Holmes Reports were replete with suggestions about classroom teachers. Several others have targeted administrator, especially principal, training. One of the more prestigious statements was from the National Governors Conference which released, in August 1986, a report called Time for Results. The report desired to

> ...match the content of state-approved administration programs to the training needed by effective school principals.

It further suggested reviewing the content of such programs, but gave little hint as to what it would compare them with.

Some months later, the University Council for Educational Administration issued a study called Leaders for American Schools. Its major recommendation was for an internship. In addition, it recommended better quality courses and the use of practitioners as instructional staff. The result was produced by a commission which based few, if any, conclusions on research.

Most recently, the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education issued a report by an eleven-member subcommittee which concluded that administrator training courses

> ...are unrelated to what administrators do or should do.

The report also suggested a forum on teaching and learning, fewer administration courses, an internship, planned sequences of courses, and a tightened admission process.

All of these three reports and the others which have not been cited share four features. These are:

1) They were all made by persons not directly involved in serving schools;
2) They are based on opinion;
3) They make glittering conclusions;
4) They are based on no quantified or other systematic research.

The old story goes that after the lighting experiment in the Hawthorne Study proved to be a failure, since the workers kept producing regardless of the illumination level, one of the researchers asked one of the workers why she was straining herself so much. She replied that it was the first time that anyone had taken an interest in her since she had been employed by the company. Therefore, the logical thing to do in the current educational setting would seem to be to copy Hawthorne and to take sufficient interest in the principals and ask them.

Therefore, it was determined to survey all of the principals in Arkansas to determine their attitude toward

matters which were lacking in their preparation and what should have been provided to them. The study was supported by the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation as part of its commitment to the Goodlad Consortium in Arkansas.

Scope of the Study

One thousand and twenty-one (1,021) principals in Arkansas' public and private schools were sent surveys. A follow-up reminder was mailed to all school superintendents to ask their principals to complete the form. Six hundred and sixty-one (661) usable responses were received.

The Questionnaire

The form sent to the principals consisted of forty-five items to be assessed on a modified, five choice, Likert scale. In addition, a demographic item as to the level of school (Elementary, Middle, etc.) was included.

Source of the Questions

The questions came from two main sources. Groups of principals involved in the Goodlad Consortium in the state were asked to suggest areas in which they felt that they required more training when they first became a principal. They reacted both verbally and in writing. In addition, other items were added from the reports in the literature and four items were taken from Peters and Waterman's In

Search of Excellence. The latter was done to see if the average principal felt a need to carry out these activities.

Treatment of the Data

Some 41 of the 45 items resulted in responses significant at the .01 level of confidence, as measured by a t test and a Chi square analysis. No significant differences were found among the various levels of principals. The items will be discussed in decreasing order of agreement.

Results

The most popular item on the form was that "Learning to observe teachers would have been quite useful;" This was closely followed by; "There should have been training in scheduling;" "More courses should have been taught by practicing principals;" "More training should have been given on interviewing;" and "Courses should have helped me develop organizational ability."

Of this group, the only real indictment of current program patterns, not easily repaired, is the matter of courses being taught by practicing principals. It seems rather a poor reflection that a fully employed principal could prepare a better class than a full-time instructor. It could be that the principal can tell more war stories or make the class seem more practical. It could also be, as is

the case with some adjunct instructors, that they run shorter classes with fewer assignments.

The second group of responses, just slightly less, accepted by the respondents included--"I knew little about the remediation of teachers." "I needed to learn more about financial reports." "An internship would have proven quite useful," "There should have been more emphasis on computer use," and "I needed to know more about bookkeeping and budgeting."

These items say a good deal about how the pre-service curriculum for principals should be restructured. An internship seems a necessity. Not because it ranked so high amid the items, but because it can cover so many of the other specifics. As just one example, teacher remediation. How better to learn it than to work under a principal doing it?

The financial items pose another problem. It has been the practice to restrict courses in School Finance and School Business Management to post-masters students as it was thought that these were minor concerns of building principals. The position may well have to be rethought, especially since the eleventh most agreed upon item was that "I needed more background in School Finance." It is quite probable that graduates of the program, until quite recently, received no computer training. It was

unavailable. Now it is and might well become a requirement for future administrators.

Items twelve through fifteen were as follows. "There should have been less emphasis on social science;" "I should have been trained to write grant proposals;" "I did not know how to handle due process or IEPs;" and "There was a lack of training in clinical supervision."

These items tend to question the need for a social science cognate for principals and reinforce the need for more training in supervision. The need to write grants is questionable being more decorative than essential to the job. The item was included because it was not considered a part of a principal's job. Most school districts have someone on the payroll or contracted to write grants. Few, if any, are written without the knowledge, cooperation, and support of the Superintendent's office. How much this item should affect the preparatory curriculum seems conjectural.

The fourth set of responses in level of acceptance included the following, "I needed to know more about state and North Central accreditation;" "My training should have stressed communicating goals and objectives;" "Courses should have stressed communication skills more;" "A better background in assertive discipline should be provided;" and "There was enough administrative theory."

At this point, the dichotomy between theory and practice as the basis for principal preparation becomes most

pronounced. Specifics regarding accreditation, specifics about a certain disciplinary package, and particulars about communication are requested. On the other hand, theory seems well covered. Oddly, in all this, theory and practice meet. The communication of goals and objectives is directly from Peters and Waterman's In Search of Excellence. It is only one of two modern management ideas well accepted. Perhaps the gap is not as great as it would at first seem.

Items twenty-one through twenty-five, showing less agreement but still a statistically significant one include the following; "There should have been more emphasis on human relations;" "I needed more training in P.E.T., and Classroom Management;" "I was familiar with how to support my staff;" "There should have been more emphasis upon state and federal forms;" and "I needed to know more about curriculum."

Once more the theory/practice split appears and becomes vague. The emphasis upon forms and a canned teaching program are the responsibility of the State Department of Education or the local school district. Whoever mandates the method should be responsible for the in-service education to implement it.

On the other hand, the respondents claimed to know how to support their staff. This is one of the marks of excellence, yet so few of the schools are so recognized.

The next group includes several program specifics. "There should have been more emphasis on school boards and policies;" "Statistics were not a valuable experience;" "I learned enough about child development;" "There should have been more training about the change process;" and "I should have been given a greater understanding of the state standards.

Although several of these specifics have meaning for principal preparation programs, the last does not. "The standards warrant but passing notice in a course;" "They change;" These have been in effect since 1983. In-depth understanding of the standards is a function of the local district or, more importantly, the state education agency. The state should sponsor regular workshops in the standards for new principals or turn this function over to the Administrators' organization. It is not the function of a university, especially since the history of the receipt of sufficient numbers of these kinds of materials from the state has not been good (if they are used in a class, the instructor must provide the copies).

The next group, moving closer to a lack of significance, presents some odd results. It was felt that, "There should have been more emphasis on attendance records;" "That the required counseling course was not a good experience;" "Respondents should have had more training

in analyzing problems;" and "I understood how to reward achievement and high performance."

The matter of ethics and problem analysis seems to refute the negative attitude toward theory. Perhaps, if it is not called theory, it assumes more respectability. The latter item, rewarding achievement, is from Peters and Waterman. Since this has not been a hallmark of administrative training until the use of that book, it seems a strange area of agreement.

The last group on the border of significance includes items to the effect that, "My program taught me enough about civil rights;" "Educational Foundations courses were not useful;" "Involving people on a team was part of my training;" I needed more of a background in inpersonal skills;" I did not learn how to encourage innovation;" and "My administrator training was too general."

The apparent contradiction between team building and a lack of interpersonal skills does not seem understandable. Although the opposition to foundations courses, while claiming that the program was too general, was not.

It seems evident from the responses and the larger number of significant ones that the respondents, in retrospect, saw a need for ad hoc, immediate need satisfying training. This should not be surprising. The daily routine of the job becomes the job more times than not, and the

organization and satisfaction of the routine becomes paramount.

Oddly, however, the results cannot be termed an indictment of current principal preparation. The item asking if preparation had been to general, received no significant agreement. Thus, these results do not mean that present principal prepration be jettisoned. No one suggested its utter disutility. Rather what it means is that other items must somehow be added to principal preparation to make it more useful to the practitioner.

Some of what should be added, can be, by reorganizing the curriculum and some courses. For others, there must be a dependency upon training by other organizations.

Educational Training

A clear distinction must be drawn between education and training. One teacher knows to do something. Fill out a form, communicate effectively, observe a teacher. This is called training. Education adds an essential element. Thought! Why the form is filled out, the results of effective communication, how to build upon an observation or its products. The question is not whether both are necessary, but rather how to deliver them.

A pre-service group of classes organized into a curriculum can educate a prospective principal. It cannot train to the extent desired by the respondents in this

survey. Other agencies can and should carry out the ad hoc training. Various forms, mandated methodologies and standards are the responsibility of the agency, be it the local school district or the state education department. Professional organizations can help along this line as well. A partnership between agencies can effectively deliver in-service education of the ad hoc variety.

Comments

Several of the seeming contradictions have received comments in the review of the responses. Two additional situations seem to deserve discussion. These are the fate of the excellence items and the stylishness of responses generally.

Five critical functions drawn from Peters and Waterman by Morsink were included as questions 41 through 45. These same items were also identified as being common with effective schools' research materials.[1] Therefore, it was assumed that if the average principal kept up with new developments, they would recognize and seize on these items. Some may have, but the bulk did not, and gave them generally a low level of acceptance.

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[1]Catherine Morsink. "Critical Functions of the Educational Administrator: Perceptions of Chairpersons and Deans," Journal of Teacher Education, XXXIII, 5, October 1987, pp. 23-27.

Therefore, it would seem that although theory was regarded as having been available in sufficient quantity, its knowledge is not maintained. Theory is added to, just as any ad hoc area. It would seem that universities and other purveyors of theory have a role in the continuing education of principals by keeping them up-to-date in ideas. These seem quite as important as new state regulations.

Some of the respondents may have claimed to resent ideas, but all showed signs of being manipulated by them. The item about observing teachers ranked first in agreement. Others about remediation of teachers and their clinical supervision were not too far behind. Curriculum was close to the bottom. Yet, in the summer of 1985, the State Department of Education had taken up a survey including 178 principals to choose the ten items most important to them on their job.[2] The principal, as the instructional leader with curriculum courses, was third on the list. No mention was made of observing teachers. In that year, much discussion was being carried on about the principal and curriculum. When Teacher Assessment was developed a few months later, it seem evident that priorities started to shift. Outside pressure shifted top priorities in three years.

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[2]Arkansas State Department of Education. "Final Summary and Ranking of Items on Administrators Need Survey," Little Rock: The Department of Education, 1985.

Not only does this show the basic stylishness of ad hoc needs, it aptly demonstrates why a university pre-service curriculum cannot be built upon them. No matter how the ad hoc needs were served in one time and place, they would not fit another. Hence, a university must base its curriculum on more solid ground.

Theory or general principles cannot be taken away from a preparatory program. It, after all, provides the glue with which to organize ideas. It prepares the learner for the always changing details. It teaches the learner to think. If education in thought is done away with, all that will remain is a second-rate training program, dated at its completion and notable only for its lack of rationale.

Summary

It would seem evident that pre-service training programs for school administrators will never be able to cover all of the potential demands made on a principal. This is especially true in an era of reform. The next need is not yet determined. What they can do is give a thorough grounding in theory and in practice as demands are frozen at a given point in time. For the newly demanded skills, other agencies such as State Departments of Education or Administrator Associations should fill the needs. This is all that can rationally be expected.

Proposed Curricular Changes

Merely because it is not rational or practical to make pre-service principal training a mass of ad hoc concerns does not mean that its present form should not be changed and changed drastically. The following would seem to be in order as a result of the survey.

1. There should be an internship required of all prospective principals. This should include a list of experiences and competencies which might well cover the bulk of the current ad hoc concerns. Even under these circumstances, it must be noted that new functions arising after the internship, and prior to employment, will still be perceived as lacking in the preparation.
2. The basic computer course should be required of all prospective principals.
3. School finance should be required as part of the post-master courses for principal certification.
4. Courses should provide more opportunity to observe teachers, either classmates or videotapes, and role play supervisory conferencing.
5. Courses should be retitled and reorganized to match them with the current state of the art and the inclusion of ad hoc material as needed.

6. Courses which cover some ad hoc features, for example organizational skills, should be more clearly tied into overall theory so that the student may understand the relationships in what is being covered.
7. The Social Science restriction for the cognate requirement should be dropped.
8. Practicing administrators should be involved as guest presenters and reactors in Educational Administration pre-service courses. The entire course should not be turned over to them or quality control disappears.
9. Arrangements should be made with the State Department of Education and the Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators to divide the responsibility for principal education. In-Service programs are evidentally the pervue of the State and the Administrators. These should supplement the University's program and provide the training in new ad hoc skills. As noted earlier, the University could have a role in this in updating principals on theory research and ideas.

APPENDIX A

RESPONSES RANKED IN DESCENDING ORDER
of ACCEPTABILITY

Positive and Negative Answers Are Not Distinguished

Question Number	Response
31	Learning to observe teachers would have been quite useful.
12	There should have been training in scheduling.
25	More courses should have been taught by practicing principals.
29	More training should be given in interviewing.
11	Courses should have helped me develop organizational ability.
17	I knew little about remediation of teachers.
5	I need to learn more about financial reports.
10	An internship would have proven quite useful.
13	There should have been more emphasis on computer use.
20	I needed to know more about bookkeeping and budgeting.
38	I needed more of a background in school finance.
23	There should have been more emphasis on social science.
32	I should have been trained to write grant proposals.
22	I did not know how to handle due process or I.E.P.s.
18	There was a lack of training in clinical supervision.
14	I needed to know more about state and North Central accreditation.

Question Number	Response
41	My training should have stressed communicating goals and objectives.
9	Courses should have emphasized communication skills more.
19	A better background in assertive discipline be provided.
3	There was not enough administrative theory.
26	There should have been more emphasis on human relations.
16	I needed more training in P.E.T. and Classroom Management.
43	I was familiar with how to support my staff.
21	There should have been more emphasis on state and federal forms.
35	I needed to know more about curriculum.
28	There should have beem more emphasis on school boards and policy.
27	Statistics were a valuable experience.
6	I did not learn enough about child development.
33	There should have been more training about the change process.
34	I should have been given a better understanding of the state standards.
15	The program should have included a treatment of ethics.
4	There should have been more emphasis on attendance records.
30	The counseling course was a good experience.

Question Number	Response
40	I should have had more training in analyzing problems.
45	I understood how to award achievement and high performance.
7	My program taught me too little about civil rights.
2	Educational Foundations courses were quite useful.
44	Involving people on a team was involved in my training.
8	I needed more of a background in interpersonal skills.
42	I did not learn how to encourage innovation.
1	My administrator training was too general.
39	Management as conducted by business should have been taught.
24	My program did not cover how to deal with patrons, the public and the media.
36	I did not learn enough about discipline at the building level.
37	I did not sufficiently understand leadership styles.